

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 8968

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY  
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FUAD BOUTROS AND  
SHEIKH MICHEL KHOURY

1. SUMMARY. AT DINNER DEC 18 WITH FOREIGN MINISTER FUAD BOUTROS AND SHEIKH MICHEL KHOURY, UNOFFICIAL PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR AND SON OF LEBANON'S FIRST PRESIDENT, BOUTROS AND KHOURY DESCRIBED SYRIAN INTERFERENCE IN LEBANON'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS AS ONE OF PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS PRESIDENT SARKIS WAS FACING. NEITHER MEN SEEMED SURPRISED BY SUCH INTERFERENCE BUT IT WAS COMPLICATING PROBLEM FOR WHICH THERE NO OBVIOUS SOLUTION. STRENGTHENING BAATH PARTY, DENYING POLITICAL ROLE TO PROMINENT LEBANESE POLITICIANS AND PROMOTING FORTUNES OF SYRIA'S FRIENDS WERE CHARACTERISTIC OF SYRIA'S INTERNAL POLITICAL ACTIVITY HERE. END SUMMARY.

2. SATURDAY NIGHT, DEC 18, I HAD A BUSINESS DINNER IN JOUNIEH WITH FUAD BOUTROS, FOREIGN MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND SHEIKH MICHEL KHOURY, ONE OF PRESIDENT SARKIS' UNOFFICIAL ADVISORS, A FORMER MINISTER AND SON OF LEBANON'S FIRST PRESIDENT, BASHARA AL-KHOURY. THE DINNER WAS AT MICHEL'S HOUSE AND, EXCEPT AT THE BEGINNING WHEN THE MARONITE BISHOP OF TYRE YUSEF  
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KHOURY AND MICHEL EDDE, BUSINESSMAN AND FORMER DEPUTY, WERE PRESENT, THE THREE OF US WERE ALONE. BOUTROS AND KHOURY, AS THE DEPARTMENT MAY BE AWARE, HAVE BEEN CLOSE FRIENDS FOR MANY YEARS. BOUTROS HAD SUGGESTED THE DINNER AS A MORE SATISFACTORY MEANS OF CONTACT THAN A FORMAL CALL AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. THIS

CABLE DEALS LARGELY WITH ASPECTS OF SYRO-LEBANESE RELATIONS. OTHER SUBJECTS RAISED IN THE CONVERSATION ARE BEING REPORTED BY SEPTTEL.

3. THE COURSE OF THE CONVERSATION UNDERLINED THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PROBLEMS LEBANON IS FACING -- PROBLEMS WHICH NONETHELESS SEEMED TO BE A STIMULATING CHALLENGE RATHER THAN A DISCOURAGEMENT TO BOTH MEN. AMONG THE FOREMOST OF THESE WERE RELATIONS WITH THE SYRIANS. BOTH MEN WERE APPRECIATIVE OF SYRIA'S EFFORTS, RESPECTED ASSAD, REALIZED THERE WAS A PRICE TO PAY FOR SYRIAN ASSISTANCE, BUT THE QUESTION WAS HOW MUCH. AS FAR AS OVERALL RELATIONS WERE CONCERNED, THEY CONSIDERED THAT SARKIS HAD REASONABLY GOOD RAPPORT WITH ASSAD. PART OF THIS KHOURY ATTRIBUTED TO TWO SECRET VISITS BOUTROS HAD MADE TO DAMASCUS RECENTLY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE LEBANESE WERE IN THE DARK AS TO WHAT SYRIA EXPECTED OF THEM. THE LEBANESE HAD TRIED TO ESTABLISH A MECHANISM FOR ENSURING A REGULAR EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS, BUT THE SYRIANS SEEMED RELUCTANT TO DO SO.

4. SYRIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON'S DOMESTIC AFFAIRS HAS GREATLY COMPLICATED SARKIS' WORK. ONE, BUT CERTAINLY NOT THE ONLY, REASON SARKIS DID NOT CREATE A POLITICAL CABINET WAS THAT THE SYRIANS REFUSE TO PERMIT CERTAIN IMPORTANT POLITICAL LEADERS SUCH AS JUNBLATT TO PLAY ANY ROLE IN LEBANESE POLITICAL LIFE. NEITHER BOUTROS NOR KHOURY HAD ANY BRIEF FOR JUNBLATT, BUT THEY BELIEVE HE IS AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL FACT OF LIFE WHO CANNOT

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BE IGNORED. THE SAME PROBLEM APPLIES TO SOME EXTENT TO GOL'S EFFORTS TO REESTABLISH ITS ARMY. IN ADDITION TO ITS NEGATIVE INFLUENCE, THE SYRIANS WERE TRYING TO PROMOTE CERTAIN LEBANESE FOR POSITIONS IN THE GOVERNMENT SUCH AS ASSEM KANSO, LEADER OF LEBANON'S PRO-SYRIAN BAATH PARTY, WHOM SARKIS DID NOT WANT. IN GENERAL, THE SYRIANS WERE TRYING TO STRENGTHEN THE PRO-SYRIAN BAATH IN LEBANON AND HAD WOODED AS WELL WITH CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS THE PPS THROUGH THE PERSON OF ABDULLAH SAADI, PPS LEADER IN AMIOUN, A GREEK ORTHODOX CENTER IN THE KOURA DISTRICT NEAR TRIPOLI. ACCORDING TO KHOURY, THE SYRIANS WERE ALSO MAKING IT DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR CERTAIN DEPUTIES TO SERVE IN PARLIAMENT.

5. KHOURY FELT THAT IF ONLY THE SYRIANS WOULD CONSULT WITH THE GOL SOME OF THE PROBLEMS CREATED BY PRECIPITATE SYRIAN ACTION COULD BE AVOIDED. FOR EXAMPLE, ACCORDING

TO KHOURY, THE GOL WAS IN THE PROCESS OF TAKING ACTION AGAINST THE ANTI-SYRIAN ATTACKS OF AL MOHARRIR AND SOME OF THE OTHER FOREIGN SUBSIDIZED LEBANESE PAPERS, WHEN THE SYRIANS OCCUPIED THE PAPERS.

6. COMMENT. THE ABOVE PRESENTATION WAS MADE LARGELY BY KHOURY. HE APPRECIATED FULLY THAT THE SYRIANS HAD A DIFFERENT FORM OF GOVERNMENT AND CONSEQUENTLY A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO MATTERS THAN THE LEBANESE. CONSEQUENTLY SYRIAN BEHAVIOR WAS NOT UNEXPECTED. HE EVEN THOUGHT THAT THE LEBANESE COULD PROFIT TO SOME EXTENT FROM SYRIAN DISPLAY OF DISCIPLINE WHICH WAS SO FOREIGN TO THE LEBANESE LAISSER FAIRE APPROACH WHICH ALL TOO OFTEN BORDERED ON LICENSE. NONETHELESS, SYRIAN INTERFERENCE WAS AN EMBARRASSEMENT AND COMPLICATED SARKIS' EFFORTS TO UNIFY AND GET THE COUNTRY BACK ON ITS FEET. WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT WAS A PROBLEM FOR WHICH THEY DID NOT HAVE AN ANSWER AND FOR WHICH PERHAPS THERE IS NO CONFIDENTIAL

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ANSWER AS LONG AS THE GOL HAS TO RELY ON THE SYRIAN ARMY FOR SECURITY.

6. A RISK IS THAT, IN THEIR DETERMINATION TO BRING ORDER OUT OF CHAOS IN LEBANON, THE SYRIANS MAY NOT SUFFICIENTLY APPRECIATE THE IMPORTANCE OF BACKING SARKIS AND THE INSTITUTION OF THE PRESIDENCY OF LEBANON -- THE ONLY AVAILABLE INSTRUMENT FOR EFFECTIVE LEBANESE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. STRONG-ARM TACTICS WITHOUT SARKIS' APPROVAL WILL DENY HIM THAT MYSTIQUE OF POWER AND EFFECTIVENESS WHICH IS ESSENTIAL IF SARKIS IS TO CARRY OUT SUCCESSFULLY LEBANON'S RECONSTRUCTION. HOUGHTON

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